

Address to the SCC hearing on Dominion Power proposal for a Haymarket power transmission line. Delivered at Battlefield High school May 2 2016.

My name is Thomas Sheehan and I live xxx Haymarket.

I am an architect and I create space for human habitation using texture, color, pattern, scale, and proportions that cause a desired reaction in humans. A space can be designed to give the feeling that you are in the presence of God, or designed to cause you to realize beyond a doubt that you are imprisoned, simply by the manipulation texture, color, scale, and proportions.

What I have to say may be esoteric but I seek to add definition to the numerous public comments about the deleterious effects of the proposed power transmission lines to the view scape.

Successful scale and proportion are based on what we are most familiar with, the human body. From the Greek Parthenon, through Renaissance cathedrals, to the Empire State Building; human scale and proportions have been the guiding design bases. The modern transmission towers ignore this, they lack the grace and proportions of Eiffel's tower in Paris; they look more like a child's erector set in hands of a madman. The power poles look like, but lack, the proportions of trees: no branches to help scale; leafless, perpetually in winter dress.

Transmission lines running over fields and hills to the horizon lack the scale and proportion of the Roman aqueducts. These power transmission elements are unnatural boundaries - they define the limits of the natural environment, a fact that grates on the human spirit. All this incongruity with nature and human scale create apprehension in the subconscious mind.

If you have an opportunity, I suggest you take a walk through a neighborhood that has overhead power distribution and transmission lines; then contrast it with a walk through a neighborhood where all utilities are buried. You will experience a feeling of tension in the former, and relaxation in the latter.

It is this inner tension that causes people to be dismayed by this overhead transmission infrastructure.

Over time, the mind learns to ignore the power lines, a condition the power companies count on to claim negative impact. But the subconscious reaction still exists as strong as ever, and creates a state of discomfort that is difficult to describe, but is very real. In short, we have trouble relating favorably to the power transmission lines because they do not relate to us. They are best hidden underground, out of sight and out of mind.

I am attaching to this testimony a copy of something I wrote when I first became aware of this project. I will not take up your time reading it now, but please take time to do so at your leisure.

It is entitled "Who speaks for beauty" and describes my personal relationship to the environment. Some have told me that it reflects their sentiments as well.

I thank you for the opportunity to voice my opinion and hope that you, will speak for beauty.

Who Speaks For Beauty?

There is an area in western Prince William County known as the Rural Crescent. It is a planned preservation area intended to strengthen this county's ability to control urban sprawl, to maintain local farmland, and a country atmosphere. On the zoning map it forms a rough crescent shape and thus is called the Rural Crescent. It has limited utilities; any who live here are on septic and well water, which lowers costs to county taxpayers, and also controls the density development of the land.

Dominion Power now proposes to erect a 230 kilovolt above-ground transmission line through the Rural Crescent, clearing acres of land at the base of Bull Run Mountain from the northern PWC boundary to the town of Haymarket. This line will forever impact the country atmosphere and ruin the pastoral views of the mountain and all the green space around it. When a friend of my wife heard of this, he wrote this comment: "It is an honor and privilege to stand with you and your husband against the decimation of beauty!" This man is totally blind, has been since birth, yet he respects beauty and realizes it is worth fighting to preserve it.

How much more important is it for those of us who can see to fight against what will be lost?: The sight of a sunrise on the mountain, bathing it in a veil of gold that slips down onto the purple gray of night still hanging onto the lower slopes. The sight of wild tom turkeys strutting on the meadow at the edge of the wood while their hens pretend to ignore them. The sight of a fawn sleeping in the tall grass, while its mother grazes nearby. The sight of a summer rain topping the mountain ridge and rushing down like a misty avalanche, almost hissing like a tea kettle starting to boil. The vista of seductively green hay fields stretching across the valley floor to the woods beyond. It is a place of bald eagles, hawks, and vultures riding the air currents high above; of geese driving wedges through the sky and descending to rest in an open field, dropping so close to the earth that you can hear the air in their wings, so close you might be able to reach up and touch them. It is the home of foxes, rabbits, squirrels, bears, raccoons, coyotes, bees, and butterflies - all nature's creatures still here.

It is a beauty that strikes to the very soul, calms the spirit, and soothes the stress. A visit to the Rural Crescent is escaping to a time nearly forgotten. I grew up in Washington and drank milk from cows that grazed out here. At that time Routes 7 and 50 were two-lane country roads, and Route 66 was a song about a mystic highway out West. We drove out to the country to see the cows graze, smell the fresh air, and escape the hassle of the city. We would find a spot under a tree and spread out a picnic lunch. It refreshed us, reinvigorated us, and relaxed us. This countryside can still do that today. The proposed power line will cut like a saber slash through this valley, with a harsh reminder that some think "progress" is more important than the place where it exists. More basic to the issue is that the power line will be like the scout ant on your kitchen counter that finds the spilled sugar, a small innocuous creature hardly noticed, but if not stopped, followed by the entire troop of ants. The power line is the first intruder - if not stopped, more will follow.

The Rural Crescent was set up to be a buffer to keep sprawl from consuming the entire county. It is like beach dunes protecting the coast from the ever-pounding sea. They disappear if a storm washes them

away. They have to be constantly reinforced and carefully maintained to withstand the storms. The Rural Crescent has value far beyond the land contained in it, it sustains beauty, and is a monument to all that have existed in this area at the base of Bull Run Mountain; from the Indians who lived here, to the frontiersmen who first ventured here, to the infantry armies who fought and died here, to the farmers who fed the cities to the east. If the Rural Crescent falls apart, its beauty will vanish.

Money and power speak loudly around here. Who speaks for beauty?

Thomas Sheehan, Haymarket, VA